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"A BETTER TEACHER THAN AQUINAS"

BY EDWIN GREENLAW

As a means for correcting and checking the results gained through the study of Milton's sources in general and of his borrowings from other poets, an examination of the influence of Spenser upon *Paradise Lost* presents a unique opportunity. For the testimony about this influence is of unquestioned authority. Dryden says that Milton acknowledged that Spenser was his original, and Milton himself called Spenser a better teacher than Aquinas. Yet at first sight no two poems have less in common than the *Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*. In plot, in structure, in incident, in style, and apparently in temper, they seem utterly unlike. Because of these facts, Professor Raleigh remarks that Dryden's statement is "incredible . . . unless we understand 'original' in the sense of his earliest admiration, his poetic godfather who first won him to poetry." Of Milton's own testimony, Professor Raleigh merely remarks that he must have been conscious "that he was maintaining a bold paradox in an age when scholasticism still controlled education." As to Spenser's influence on *Paradise Lost*, we read that in the poem there are "hints unconsciously taken and touches added, perhaps, from his reading of other poets—of Caedmon, Andreini, and Vondel, of Spenser, Sylvester, Crashaw, and the Fletchers."¹

Professor Raleigh may, therefore, be taken to represent that large company of critics who, perhaps fortunately, do not recognize Spenser as a "source." Most other critics who touch on the subject at all may be represented by Professor Cory, who protests, I think rightly, against prevailing tendencies to stress continental influences on Milton to the exclusion of English influence, but who despite his distaste for the "loads of learned lumber" about parallel passages does not get away from the methods he deprecates. He insists, through repetition rather than through proof, that in *Paradise Lost* "the sterner side of Spenser illumined Milton's gloomy sublimity at times when he dwelt upon the tragic contest of passions and forces good and evil." Eden is described with Spenserian ardor, and "though Milton was sternly renouncing these fancies he was renouncing them with an audible sigh."²

¹ These three statements are found in Raleigh's *Milton*, pp. 7, 8, 105.

² *Spenser, the School of the Fletchers, and Milton*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, II. 368-369.

A further review of the treatment of this subject by writers upon Milton is unnecessary, for it would merely confirm what is here pointed out, that the very clear and direct statements by Dryden and by Milton himself are ignored, are interpreted vaguely, or are illustrated merely by citation of parallel passages drawn, in the main, from the minor poems.³ Nevertheless, I believe that we have here a problem that is of no little importance. An attempt to solve it may yield results that are interesting in themselves; it ought also to be of value from the standpoint of method. Source study in the usual sense is not involved,—it is this misconception of the problem that has so long led us astray, but the solution that I shall propose will have at least the virtue of definiteness, and if it should be accepted will lead to a much sounder and clearer conception of the real meaning of *Paradise Lost* than can be gained in any other way.

I

In the Preface to his *Fables*, Dryden remarks:

Milton was the poetical son of Spenser . . . for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuates that the soul of Chaucer was transfus'd into his body, and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledg'd to me that Spenser was his original.

This passage is significant because it phrases a conception of literary relationship very often overlooked. Professor Raleigh's explanation that Dryden probably meant that Spenser was Milton's literary godfather will not do, for Dryden's words, if they mean anything at all, not only imply heredity analogous to blood relationship as of father to son but also include a sort of spiritual transmigration. Moreover, the relationship between Chaucer and Spenser is curiously analogous to that between Spenser and Milton in that it is not a relationship manifested in repetition of plot and incident, not even in style and general conception or structurê, but a far deeper and more intimate relationship of the spirit. That this relationship of the spirit

³ Professor Thompson quotes Dryden's remark and explains it by the stimulus given by Spenser to Milton's poetic life, particularly as humanist and as Puritan. But Dr. Thompson, like his predecessors, finds this influence only in the early poems: "Neither Milton's epics nor *Samson Agonistes* could be so directly influenced by Spenser. In selecting the theme of *Paradise Lost* Milton purposely turned away from the romantic world of the *Faerie Queene* . . . the Minor Poems are the most unmistakably Spenserian and in *Paradise Lost* other influences predominate." *Essays on Milton*, 166-170.

is no vague thing, I have sought to show in another place.⁴ But it was an influence operative chiefly in Spenser's early period; Spenser's influence on Milton, on the other hand, while constant and pervasive, finds its most important illustrations in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. While we have no full account of the conversation between Dryden and Milton in which Milton acknowledged that Spenser was his 'original' we know that such a meeting or meetings took place, that Dryden sought Milton's permission to use the great epic as the foundation for his *State of Innocence*, and that Milton gave him permission to "tag" his verses.⁵ There is good reason to suppose, therefore, that Milton made this statement about his indebtedness to Spenser in connection with a discussion of *Paradise Lost*, and that the word 'original' is no mere term of vague compliment but has a definite meaning. What this meaning is I think it possible to ascertain.

Certain fundamental parallels between Milton and Spenser should be kept in mind throughout the discussion which follows. In the first place, both men held similar views about poetry and education. To both, the poet is a teacher. In the tract on Education, Milton dwells on the high function of poetry: "I mean not here the prosody of a verse . . . but that sublime art [which shows] what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things." In the same essay he defines the end of learning as "possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection," and he returns to the general idea in the famous definition, "I call, therefore, a complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war."⁶ With these passages compare Spenser's statement, in his letter to Raleigh, of the educational aims of his

⁴ *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXVI. 419 ff., but see especially pp. 438-444.

⁵ Aubrey seems to include Dryden among Milton's "familiar learned acquaintance," since the reference comes in connection with such a list. The part of it referring to the visit reads: "Jo. Dryden, Esq., Poet Laureate, who very much admired him, and went to him to have leave to put his *Paradise Lost* into a drama in rhyme. Mr. Milton received him civilly, and told him he would give him leave to tag his verses." I quote from Professor Lockwood's edition of "Education, Areopagitica" etc., pp. xxxix-xl, in which she reprints Aubrey's *Life*.

⁶ There is a long passage at the beginning of the second book of *The Reason of Church Government* that further amplifies this conception of the educational function of poetry.

poem: "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." Again, after stating that he was following the examples of Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, and Tasso in representing the virtues of the private man and the valiant governor, he remarks on the superiority of poetry to philosophy in these words, "So much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample than by rule." There are other passages which show that the two men looked upon poetry as a sort of philosophy teaching by example. To this point should be added the fact, which needs no special illustration, that Milton resembled Spenser in his conception of the relation of the poet to the state; in a sense, Milton was a courtier as understood by Castiglione, Sidney, and Spenser. Finally, there is a fundamental parallelism in thought, as, for example, in the idea common to the two men that virtue is active not passive, in the strong sense of symbol behind the fact, and, as will be pointed out below, in the fact that *Paradise Lost* not less than the *Faerie Queene* is a moral allegory, not merely poetical theology.

With this preparation we are ready to examine Milton's statement that he regarded Spenser as a better teacher than Aquinas. The reference comes in a passage of some length that expresses the very heart of the argument in the *Areopagitica*:

As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? ¹ He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excrementall whiteness; which was the reason why our sage and serious Poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon and the bowr of earthly blisse, that he might see and know, and yet abstain.

How completely the significance of this passage has been overlooked is indicated by the way in which it has been annotated. For example, Professor Hales speaks of the influence of Spenser, manifested through allusions and parallel passages, on Milton's earlier poems; he cites several examples of this, and refers to one, out of several

that he might have named, of Milton's other references to Spenser in his prose. His note on Aquinas misses the special point of Milton's reference. It will also be observed that Milton conceives of virtue as active, not passive; it is characteristic of a human, struggling personality, not an abstraction. Again, such a man is here conceived as a “war-faring Christian”; he purges his nature of impurity through trial.⁷ And in Spenser's Guyon, Milton finds concrete illustration of this doctrine. The importance of both doctrine and illustration is indicated by Milton's remarks, a moment later, on his conception of the sin of Adam:

Many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering Adam to transgresse. Foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not of that obedience or love or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu? They are not skilfull considerers of human things, who imagin to remove sin by removing the matter of sin . . . Suppose we could expell sin by this means; look how much we thus expell of sin, so much we expell of vertue: for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and ye remove them both alike. This justifies the high providence of God, who though he command us temperance, justice, continence, yet powrs out before us ev'n to a profuseness all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety. (*Areopagitica* ed. Hales, pp. 25-26).

Adam, like Guyon, was free to choose; his virtue was tested, as Guyon's was tested, by being brought face to face with a “provoking object.” The full significance of this “provoking object” will appear later in the discussion; in the meantime it is associated with the “passions” and “pleasures” which when “rightly temper'd” or dealt with by a man possessing this ideal of temperance, become the very ingredients of virtue. What justifies God's dealings with men, Milton's theme in *Paradise Lost*, is that God tests through trial the virtues of temperance, justice, continence. This trial must be met by a virtue that though confronted by the beauty and the pleasures of a world of sense and having the power to wander beyond all limit and satiety, yet chooses good and not evil. Obedience then is not blind but a matter of choice. The philosophy is from Greece, not from Genesis, for this choice involves abstaining through temperance, the rational

⁷This word is usually printed *wayfaring*; but Professor Hales's reasons for preferring *warfaring* appear to me conclusive. (*Areopagitica*, ed. Hales, pp. 95-96).

principle of the soul, or yielding through excess, the irrational principle. Adam fell because the irrational principle in his soul, inflamed by a provoking object, triumphed over temperance, not because he disobeyed "a whimsical Tyrant, all of whose laws are arbitrary and occasional, and who exacts from his creatures an obedience that differs from brute submission in one point only, that by the gift of free-will it is put within their power to disobey."⁸

This last sentence fairly represents the issue between the usual critical position with regard to *Paradise Lost* and what I believe to have been Milton's true intention. Modern criticism of the poem has been too much influenced by Voltaire and Landor. Critics are blinded by the splendor of Milton's Satan, who has drawn many to his camp in a sense not theological. As a result the temptation and fall of Adam, instead of being the climax, seems puerile and unconvincing. As Mr. Moody expresses it, Milton's "solemnly avowed intention to 'justify the ways of God to men' was in the end a serious drag upon him"; the theology and politics of the poem are at variance, involving an "unconscious insincerity."⁹ Milton's fate in the history of criticism has by a strange irony paralleled that of his master Spenser. Both great poems have been patronized for their insufficiency of thought; Spenser's poem has been criticized for vagueness, lack of structure, tedious length, and because it is an "allegory"; Milton's for inconsistency, for representing an outworn theology, and for triviality. Both poets have been praised chiefly for certain "poetic" qualities at the expense of intellectual power, a judgment which they would have resented. Spenser's epic has no grip on reality or on thought; Milton's is a gigantic bathos, moving from a cosmic stage filled with titanic figures down to an insignificant spot on earth, where two "harmless tame creatures" (Professor Raleigh's phrase) are damned for eating an apple. Such criticism as applied to Milton, one gets a certain satisfaction in reflecting, is of Satanic origin (see *Paradise Lost*, X. 485 ff.) and was first given earthly currency, appropriately enough, by Voltaire. A fair examination of the two passages from the *Areopagitica* cited above, involving, as it must involve, consideration of the effect of Spenser's Legend of Guyon on Milton's thought and applying the results of such study to a consideration of the theme and structure of *Paradise Lost*, will supply the needed correction.

⁸ Raleigh, *Milton*, p. 130.

⁹ Cambridge edition of Milton, p. 99.

Like Milton, Spenser regards virtue as not passive, static, absolute, but active and capable of growth through use. Throughout the *Faerie Queene* are illustrations of Milton's view that the passions within the soul of man and the pleasures round about us are "the very ingredients of virtue"; that the virtues of temperance (*Faerie Queene*, book II), justice (book V), and continence (books III and IV), specially named by Milton, are confronted with a profuseness of all desirable things and that the mind of man "can wander beyond all limit and satiety" unless controlled. Such a philosophy differs widely from medieval theology, which Milton is popularly supposed to have petrified in his poem, in the sense that St. Simeon Stylites or Richard Rolle, withdrawing from the world to escape contamination, supply no ideals for either Spenser or Milton. Spenser's method combines certain medieval elements with much of Aristotle and Plato, and is further modified by his conception of the knight who is a true "war-faring Christian."

Classical elements in Spenser's exposition of the virtue of Temperance are as follows: Plato divides the soul into three principles, one rational, and two irrational. The irrational principles are anger or spirit (*θυμός*), and sensuality. Temperance, represented by Guyon, is the harmony resulting when the rational spirit rules. Fundamentally, Guyon's story is an exposition of the Platonic ideal, but certain Aristotelian elements are present, manifested in part through the systematic way in which the whole content is presented; in part through specific incidents, such as the story of Perissa, Medina, and Elissa (the golden mean), and in part through the use of figures and incidents representing "excess," such as Philotime (*φιλοτιμία*) or Ambition in the unfavorable sense, and Acrasia (*ἀκρασία*) or Incontinence.¹⁰ But this material is presented in a way highly original with Spenser, not merely because the Legend of Guyon is an admirable example of philosophy made concrete through story, which as we have seen expresses Spenser's and Milton's fundamental conception of the province of poetry, but also because the method of Spenser's allegory is unique in a sense better understood by Milton than by some of Spenser's modern interpreters.

¹⁰ See, for further exposition and illustration of Platonic and Aristotelian elements in Spenser, the valuable introductions to Miss Winstanley's editions of the *Four Hymnes* and *Faerie Queene*, Book II.

In the first place, the apparently episodic structure of one of the books of the *Faerie Queene* is organic, not a matter of chance.¹¹ The seemingly unrelated episodes in the first six cantos of Book II are *exempla* illustrating the evil effects of anger, or spirit in the unfavorable sense. Amavia, Pyrocles and Cymocles, Furor, etc., illustrate this method admirably. Besides this *exemplum* method we have, in this part of the book, the formal Aristotelian allegory of Perissa, Medina, and Elissa. In the last six cantos the stories of Maleger, Acrasia, etc., illustrate the evils of sensuality, while the story of Alma, once more scholastic allegory, presents the philosophic content in somewhat different form: Alma represents the soul in perfect command of the body. This symmetry of structure is further marked by the fact that the two great "adventures" in this book as well as in book I represent climaxes in the development of the hero, who is not an abstraction, but a man pre-eminent for the virtue which is being expounded. Spenser here combines, in each of his great heroes, the method of characterization found in the medieval romances with his formal allegory. Just as Gawain is the type of courtesy in innumerable romances of the Arthurian cycle, so Redcrosse is a man *striving* for Holiness or pre-eminent for Holiness, Guyon for Temperance, Artegall for Justice, etc. What is even more interesting is the function of the companions of these heroes. The conventional interpretation of the relation of Una, the Palmer, and Talus to the knights whom they accompany is, I believe, incorrect. These attendants are the *abstractions*: Una is Holiness, the Palmer is Temperance, Talus is Justice, in the abstract, never tempted, never at fault, always true to type. But Redcrosse, Guyon, and Artegall, while distinguished for the virtues which they represent, are human in the sense of imperfection, or to put it more accurately, they are men who strive toward perfection in that virtue. The great importance of this observation will be at once apparent. Spenser's genius is nowhere more evident than in the way in which he transforms a well-known device in characterization found in medieval romance into a means of making allegory more vivid and human than would have been possible had he used the scholastic formalism exclusively. He combines the two, as in Guyon compared with Alma. He gains a double exposition by the device, also taken from the romances, of the attendant, who is here, however, made an abstraction. Most of all, he is able to represent, especially

¹¹ I have illustrated this point in relation to the fifth book of the *Faerie Queene* in an article on "Spenser and British Imperialism," in *Modern Philology*, IX. 347 ff.

in Redcrosse and Guyon, the growth of the soul toward perfection.¹² Thus even those phases of Spenser's work which are apparently closest to scholastic method are incomparably richer than anything found in that form of allegory for which he is supposed to stand.

I now give an abstract of the principal contents of the second book with special reference to analogous situations in *Paradise Lost*. What has just been said about Spenser's adaptation of the aims and methods of scholastic allegory will assist in showing how, in both form and content on the one hand and philosophic conception of the relations between virtue and sin on the other, Spenser seemed to Milton a better teacher than Aquinas.¹³

In the main, the Legend of Guyon, like *Paradise Lost*, is concerned with two great themes: the machinations of Satan, and the Bower of Bliss. Archimago in this book is not primarily representative of the Jesuits, or even of Hypocrisy, as is often said: he stands for Satan. The source, I believe, is Tasso, particularly in the attempts made by him to create enmity between Arthur and Guyon, who here correspond to Godfrey and Rinaldo, and in his employment of a beautiful witch, Duessa, as Tasso's Satan employs Armida. That Spenser has a Satan much like Milton's in mind is indicated by the statement, "For to all good he enemy was still"; and by the fact that he has escaped from confinement and fares forth to work mischief.¹⁴ His method is to work "by forged treason or by open fight," knowing his credit to be in doubtful balance. He uses Duessa, a witch representing beauty in distress, to mislead Guyon, but this bears no relation, except of suggestion, to Milton. He appears as an old man in many of the incidents, and he disappears, being supernatural, when foiled.¹⁵ In canto vii Mammon takes the place of Archimago, representing Satan in another form. This temptation, the first great crisis in Guyon's

¹² The explanation of Spenser's method given in this paragraph is new, I believe. Miss Winstanley is so occupied with tracing the debt of Spenser to Plato and Aristotle that she quite overlooks both medieval formal allegory and the influence of the romances on the poem.

¹³ I do not for a moment wish to be interpreted as holding that this second book of Spenser's poem is a source in the sense usually understood; I am trying to show the extraordinary similarity in method and philosophy, a far more important matter. But this similarity in conception yields some surprising parallels in incident, as will be shown.

¹⁴ II. i. 5. Redcrosse had imprisoned him, I. xii.

¹⁵ II. iii. 11 ff.; vi. 47, etc. Compare the appearance as an old man with Milton's similar disguise for Satan in *Paradise Regained*.

development, is of extraordinary interest. It takes three forms, lasting three days. On the first day Guyon is tempted by wealth and power; on the second day by ambition (Philotime); on the third the climax is presented in the mysterious temptation of the tree laden with golden apples. Spenser gives many classical references in order to show the beauty of this fruit; he does not mention Eden; he does not even make clear why the apples should be a severer test of Guyon's temperance than Mammon's chests of gold and promise of power or Philotime's promise of worldly fame. That it is so regarded by Spenser is clear from the fact that Mammon's aim was

To do him deadly fall
In frayle intemperaunce through sinfull bayt,

and that Guyon, half fainting from exhaustion (an exhaustion due to lack of food and sleep as well as to the severity of the temptation) stumbles from the place. As soon as he reaches upper air

The life did flit away out of her nest
And all his senses were with deadly fit opprest.

In all this trial Guyon has not been warned that he must not succumb to the temptations of Mammon; it is his own clear spirit that is his guide. But throughout the three days he is followed by a fiend who is ready, if he yields, to pounce on him and tear him to pieces.¹⁶

The relation of this incident to our present inquiry is two-fold. In the first place, the three days temptation of Guyon concludes a series of incidents that pretty certainly influenced *Paradise Regained*, in which Christ proved his temperance in the sense understood by Spenser and Milton. Archimago representing Satan in the disguise of an old man; Mammon's proffer of riches, worldly power, fame; the three days without sleep or food, followed by exhaustion; the angel sent to care for Guyon after the trial is over; even the debates between Mammon and Guyon, which parallel Christ's rebukes of Satan, all illustrate this point. The fairy storm in *Paradise Regained* is an imitation of one in another part of Spenser's poem (III, xii, 2-3); the feast is described in Spenserian fashion, and, in general, Milton follows Spenser in representing objectively and sensuously spiritual states.¹⁷

¹⁶ vii. 26, 27, 64. The apple is explained by Warton as derived from Ovid, who says that Proserpine would have been restored to Ceres had she not plucked an apple from a tree in her garden. (*Spenser*, ed. Todd, IV, 459).

¹⁷ No part of the *Faerie Queene* was read more attentively by Milton than the second book. Belpheobe's rebuke to Braggadocchio in canto iii is closely parallel to the rebuke of Comus by the Lady, and the use of the apple as symbol of the most

In the second place, one type of intemperance, the subject of the first great crisis in Guyon's development, is unworthy ambition and lust for power; the corresponding theme in *Paradise Lost* is the fall of Satan, the first great "adventure" in Milton's epic, through yielding to the same form of intemperance.

Guyon's final "adventure," the overthrow of the Bower of Bliss, unquestionably influenced Milton's story of Adam's temptation and fall, not of course as the source of the story, but in a way fully as significant. Raphael corresponds to the Palmer, and warns Adam that reason (temperance) must control him just as the Palmer instructs Guyon. The climax of Raphael's instruction (VIII. 521-643) deals with the difference between heavenly and earthly love and beauty. The entire passage is a combination of Renaissance Platonism as illustrated in Bembo's speech in the fourth book of *Il Cortegiano* and Spenser's *Four Hymnes* with the warning against earthly love given to Guyon by the Palmer and illustrated by the episode of the Bower of Bliss. Adam speaks first of the surpassing power of Eve's beauty. His delight is sensual, he is weak against the power of her beauty; her loveliness is absolute and complete in itself, so that all higher knowledge in her presence falls degraded and by her beauty is created an awe that guards her like an angel. The germ of this conception of love is in the *Phaedrus*, in which we are told of the power of beauty to transport the man who beholds it.¹⁸ Even Adam's distinction between the ordinary delights of the senses and the "transported touch" which so powerfully moves him in the presence of Eve is implicit in Plato. But in Bembo's speech and in the *Hymnes* we have the true sources of Milton's thought. To Adam's rhapsody on Eve's beauty Raphael responds that this beauty, while real and worthy, is but an "outside"; that the passion which so transports him is but "touch" and is possessed by beasts. On this compare Bembo's similar rebuke of love based on instincts possessed by beasts as well as men, which cannot long satisfy the lover; Spenser, in the first *Hymne*, has precisely the same thought.¹⁹ Finally, Raphael makes

severe of Mammon's temptations seems to have suggested Milton's use of this particular fruit. Finally, the description of Mammon's cave is beyond question a source of Milton's description of Hell in the first and second books of *Paradise Lost*.

¹⁸ *Phaedrus*, 239, 250, 251; see also *Symposium*, 211, 212, in which is the idea of a beauty that is complete and absolute.

¹⁹ *Il Cortegiano*, IV. 61-62; *Hymne in Honour of Love*, 99 ff. and 169 ff.

clear distinction between reason (temperance) and passion, and points out how love rightly conceived leads man, by successive steps, to the perception of the Heavenly Love:

In loving thou dost well; in passion not,
Wherein true Love consists not. Love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges—hath his seat
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to Heavenly Love thou may'st ascend.

This idea is familiar in Renaissance Platonism and derives ultimately from the *Symposium*. Bembo says that the soul, freed from vice and purged by true philosophy, may open those eyes which all possess but few use, and attain to the sight of Heavenly Love and Beauty. It is also the fundamental theme of the *Fowre Hymnes*.²⁰

Thus, Milton follows Spenser and Renaissance Platonists generally in his distinction between the two types of love and in his suggestion of the stages of development through which the lover passes. But it seems to have escaped notice that this Platonic mysticism is here less important to Milton than the attack on Venus Pandemos. I have already referred to the speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* in which

²⁰ The idea is too well known to require special illustration. But with the famous passage in *Symposium* 210-212 compare *Phaedrus* 237-238, in which Socrates speaks of the relation of Reason and Judgment to the true conception of Love in a way clearly indicated in the passage from *Paradise Lost* which I have just quoted: "When judgment leads us with sound reason to virtue, and asserts its authority, we assign to that authority the name of temperance; but when desire drags us irrationally to pleasures, and has established its sway within us, that sway is denominated excess." And the Earthly Love results, we are told, "When desire, having rejected reason and overpowered judgment which leads to right, is set in the direction of the pleasure which beauty can inspire, and when again under the influence of its kindred desires it is moved with violent motion towards the beauty of corporeal forms, it acquires a surname from this very violent motion, and is called love." On "the scale" by which the soul may ascend to Heavenly Love, compare Bembo's speech (*Il Cortegiano*, IV. lxviii), especially the passage beginning: "Pero l'anima, aliena dai vizii, purgata dai studii della vera filosofia, versata nella vita spirituale, ed esercitata nelle cose dell' intelletto, rivolgendosi alla contemplazion della sua propria sostanza, quasi da profondissimo sonno risvegliata, apre quegli occhi che tutti hanno e pochi adoprano, e vede in se stessa un raggio di quel lume che è la vera imagine della bellezza angelica a lei comunicata," etc.; and also, in lxix, the image of the mystic stair that bears the shadow of sensual beauty on its first step: "per la scala che nell' infimo grado tiene l' ombra di bellezza sensuale ascendiamo alla sublime stanza ove abita la celeste, amabile e vera bellezza." Here I believe we have the exact source of Milton's phrase. But the hymns to heavenly love and beauty are saturated with the same philosophy of love.

he speaks of the evil that follows when temperance, which is the result of the rule of reason and judgment, is overborne by desire, or excess. This is the true theme of Raphael's speech, and the Spenser who influences Milton at this point is the creator of Guyon rather than the singer of mystical hymns in honor of heavenly love. The relations between Raphael and Adam are in all points similar to those between the Palmer and Guyon. Raphael, sent by God to warn Adam, is pure and incorruptible; Adam is free and innocent but is subject to temptation. So also the Palmer is the abstract quality of temperance; Guyon is the man striving toward temperance or self-control. The immediate parallels are in the twelfth canto of the *Legend of Guyon*. When they draw near the Bower of Bliss, Guyon and the Palmer pass the Gulf of Greediness and the Rock of Reproach; the Palmer moralizes on the evils of sensuality (stanzas 3-9). A little later, Phaedria, who had once before tempted Guyon, again appears and is rebuked by the Palmer for immodesty (stanza 16). Various other perils of the sea are exorcised by the Palmer, who is the type of Christ, being able to still the tempest by his "vertuous Staffe" (stanza 26). A beautiful girl, apparently in deep distress, wins Guyon's pity and he orders the boat steered to where she is crying for help, but the Palmer rebukes him in almost the words used by Raphael to Adam:

She is inly nothing ill apayd;
But onely womanish fine forgery,
Your stubborne hart t'affect with fraile infirmity,
To which when she your courage hath inclined
Through foolish pittie, then her guilefull bayt
She will embosome deeper in your mind
And for your ruine at the last awayt.²¹

So in succeeding adventures, all of the same general nature, all symbolizing the danger in beauty to the unsteadfast mind. The *Vision of Maidens* is an admirable example of how the Palmer "with temperate advice discourseled" Guyon, for the knight was well-nigh overcome when his guide brought him to his senses (stanzas 66-69). Earlier in the story the Palmer had rightly phrased the warning:

Most wretched man,
That to affections does the bridle lend;

²¹ Stanzas 28-29. I suppose this scorn of woman is proof that Spenser fared ill at the hands of the sex! At least such is the usual interpretation given similar passages in *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

In the beginning they are weake and wan,
 But soone through sufferance growe to fearefull end.
 (iv. 34)

Thus the Palmer does not talk of mystical vision when the crisis comes to Guyon; Guyon is living for the time the active, not the contemplative life; he is the true warfaring Christian, and the danger in which he finds himself is clearly pointed out by his guide. So also the issue is clearly pointed out by Raphael, whose true mission is to warn Adam on precisely this point. Love, he says, is judicious, has his seat in reason, not in passion. More specifically he warns him, in a passage the full significance of which seems to have escaped the commentators:

Take heed lest passion sway
 Thy judgment to do aught which else free will
 Would not admit; thine and of all thy sons
 The weal or woe in thee is placed; beware!
 Stand fast; to stand or fall
 Free in thine own arbitrement it lies.²²

These are his final words. It is the climax of the long interview between Adam and the guide who was to him as the Palmer was to Guyon. Adam is free, as Guyon was free in the Cave of Mammon and in the Bower of Bliss. If disaster comes, it will be through the blinding of reason and judgment by passion. The provoking object is not an apple, sign of reasonless and arbitrary prohibition, but *Beauty*.

There is a certain resemblance between the Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Eden. Spenser has several similar descriptions, some of them more detailed than the one here given.²³ But here the parallel

²² Lines 635-638; 640-641. Here "free will" is identified with "temperance."

²³ The chief source of Milton's description of Eden is, I believe, the description of the Gardens of Adonis in *Faerie Queene* III. vi. According to Professor Osgood and others, this description is in the main original with Spenser, being developed from some hints found by him in classical sources. As conceived by Spenser, the gardens are mystical, and that Milton knew this and was impressed by the symbol is proved by the reference, when he is seeking to give an idea of the beauty of Eden, to their mystic value (IX. 439-442). This is not the place for working out in detail the indebtedness of Milton; a single point may make its significance clear: Spenser represents his paradise as the source of all life, not only the revival of nature with spring but the place whence all life came, just as Eden is to Milton the source of life. For an extended interpretation of Spenser's allegory, see the edition by Todd, 1805, IV. 462-463.

Mr. P. E. More (*Shelburne Essays*, IV. 239 ff.) regards the pastoral scenes in Eden as the true theme of *Paradise Lost*. "Sin", he says, "is not the innermost subject . . . not man's disobedience and fall; these are but the tragic shadows

apparently ends. Acrasia is the type of the Earthly Venus, beautiful, and tempting through her beauty alone. Guyon has been so prepared by his long training and by the warnings of the Palmer that he does not hesitate but binds her in chains of adamant and destroys her pleasant garden. There is nothing of the tragic here, the characterization, the play and counterplay of dramatic motive which, as Professor Hanford points out, form so moving and impressive a part of Milton's story. Yet, in a sense, the influence of Spenser still dominates that story. For to all intents and purposes Eve becomes the enchantress. She is, *for the time being*, transformed into Acrasia. She has become, she thinks, as the gods; her flushing cheeks betray her; she calls on her lover to complete the "glorious trial of exceeding love" by sharing her fate, whatever it may be.

Against his better knowledge, not deceived
But fondly overcome with female charm,

he yields where Guyon was strong. Having yielded, his fate is precisely what Guyon's fate would have been had Acrasia triumphed. The first effect of his sin is that where his love should have proved the scale by which to mount to the vision of Heavenly Love, it is degraded into sensuality. Once more the Platonic philosophy is made concrete through example by a method analogous to that which Milton had in mind when he called Spenser a better teacher than Aquinas. Through trial Guyon, "the true warfaring Christian," is purified; knowing "the utmost that vice promises to her followers" he has acquired the power to "see and know, and yet abstain." Confronted by a similar trial, like Guyon warned and counselled by higher power, like Guyon free to choose evil or good, Adam fell. And if Guyon and the Palmer could have looked on him, he would have seemed to them to be that fair young man whom they discovered in the embraces of Acrasia,—

O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend!

cast about the central light. Justification of the ways of God to man is not the true moral of the plot . . . the true theme is Paradise itself." This view, which is assuredly sufficiently daring in its assertion that Milton did not know what he was writing about, Mr. More tries to substantiate by proving that in the Elizabethan time everybody was writing about pastoral retreats from the material and sordid reality of life. That the pastoral element in *Paradise Lost* does find many analogues in Renaissance literature is true, and Milton's interest in the theme is palpable and sincere. But that he wrote the poem around such a conception of life is impossible of belief.

II

That we are now in a position to define exactly what Milton meant by confessing that Spenser was his original and that he regarded him as a better teacher than Aquinas, with the important bearing of these conclusions on the interpretation of the philosophical content of *Paradise Lost*, I think is clear. In part it is, as I have said, because in the *Faerie Queene* philosophy teaches by examples; Milton's conception of epic conforms to the prevailing Renaissance theory and was best illustrated for him by Spenser's poem. But more important than this is the fact that Aquinas was Aristotelian and Spenser mainly Platonic. The formalism of the one was valuable for method; the ideas of the other were to Milton, as to us, deeper and richer and nearer the religious idealism which, like Spenser, he passionately loved. I have pointed out that Spenser's account of love and beauty, derived ultimately from Plato, is a powerful influence in Milton's treatment of the relation between Raphael and Adam and in his account of Adam's sin, and that the Legend of Guyon not only illustrates perfectly Milton's idea of temperance but also furnishes the model for the philosophic content of *Paradise Lost*. We may now go a step farther.

Spenser's statement that the twelve books of his epic were to illustrate the twelve moral virtues of Aristotle must not blind us to the fact that Plato's influence on him was greater than that of Aristotle.²⁴ For example, Aristotle's *ἀνδρεία* is to Spenser much more than courage. As Miss Winstanley says, "His 'Holiness' really is the moral courage which is the true foundation of all the other virtues and is essential to them all." Redcrosse is a good example of the "true warfaring Christian" of whom Milton wrote. This is the Platonic conception of the virtue.²⁵ Again, *σωφροσύνη* in Spenser is Platonic, not Aristotelian; it means not merely temperance as absence of excess, a golden mean, but is the control of all powers, mental desires as well as physical desires, by the rational element in the soul. This, once more, is followed by Milton. Raphael warns Adam against over-curiosity in

²⁴ For a very clear statement of the relation of Spenser to Aristotle see the learned essay by Miss Winstanley in the introduction to her edition of *Faerie Queene II*, pp. 51 ff. I am greatly indebted to this essay in matters of detail, but the general theory here set forth is my own.

²⁵ See the *Protagoras*, in which Socrates says that moral courage is an essential element in temperance, and observe that Guyon as well as Redcrosse has this quality. Also observe that it is part and parcel of the teaching in *Areopagitica*.

learning as well as against misconceptions of love and beauty.²⁶ The essential difference between Platonism and Aristotelianism as interpreted by Spenser can be clearly seen if we compare the frigid and formal allegory of Perissa, Medina, and Elissa (II. ii. 13 ff.) which is of course his statement of the famous doctrine of the golden mean, with the richer and more human treatment shown in his characterization of Guyon and Britomart. As Professor Hanford has shown, Milton proves his kinship with the Elizabethans in his stress on the purely human relations of the tragedy of Adam and Eve. His treatment of the situation is analogous to Shakespeare's spiritual interpretation of external events in his tragedies. And Milton is also Elizabethan, a follower of Spenser and not Aquinas, in the fact that his epic is based on a deep and fervid idealism, a moral philosophy that is ultimately Platonic, not scholastic, and the fact that this philosophical idealism dominates the poem and unifies it.

For my interpretation, based not on the presence of verbal imitations or parallels in incident but on Milton's own testimony of his debt, on his very clear statements in *Areopagitica*, and on the philosophical affinity between the two poems, helps to make clear both theme and structure of *Paradise Lost*. Defence of dogma there assuredly is, but even this dogma is saturated with Platonism. The qualities of God, often stressed in the poem, are Justice, Love, and Wisdom; the virtue enjoined on Adam is Temperance; these are the four great “ideas” dwelt on in the *Phaedrus* and elsewhere, and dwelt on throughout the *Faerie Queene*. In thus fusing the Christian dogma with a philosophy ultimately Platonic Milton is a child of the Renaissance. In making epic the means of such fusion he is both a child of the Renaissance and the poetical son of Spenser.

²⁶ See *Paradise Lost*, VIII, 171 ff. The most convincing proof of Milton's indebtedness to Spenser's Platonism in this respect is supplied by the explanation of Eve's dream given by Adam in V. 100 ff. Adam says that in the soul are many lesser faculties that serve Reason as chief; among them is Fancy, whose office is to form imaginations of all external things supplied by the five senses. These imaginations are to be tested by Reason, framing our knowledge or opinion. So Spenser describes the house of Alma (II. ix. 10 ff.) in a passage owing much to Plato's *Republic* VIII, but also deriving elements from other Platonic passages and welded into allegorical story by use of a familiar romance situation, the Castle of Maidens in the Perceval and Galahad cycles. Alma represents the soul controlling the body through reason or temperance; the five senses are her dependents; in the brain dwell Phantastes (Fancy), with Judgment and Memory. Phantastes deals in idle thoughts, fantasies, visions and dreams, but is ruled by Alma.

If we disregard the purely theological aspect of the poem for the moment we shall see how intimately it is related to Spenser's conception. The virtue to be illustrated is Temperance, defined as control through Reason. The two great "adventures" corresponding to Guyon's experience with Mammon and the story of the Bower of Bliss, are Satan's fall through pride and lust for power, and Adam's fall through that irrational principle of the soul which operates through lust. The two stories, from this point of view, present a complete exposition of the sin that results when *ἀνδρεία* as well as *σωφροσύνη* are lacking.²⁷ Of these two incidents or "adventures," the second is by far the most important. The awakening of Satan and his followers from the fiery lake, the building of Pandemonium, and the council in Hell fascinate the reader by sheer force of Milton's pictorial imagination. We do not really sympathize with Satan as a rebel against tyranny, though we think we do. Stripped of the stage setting and the dramatic splendor of the scene, the story has no great appeal, as is proved by the fact that the story of the war in Heaven, with its account of Satan's motives and the steps he takes in his campaign, leaves us cold. Furthermore, the story of the fall of Adam immediately gains significance and interest if we recognize that the apple is but a symbol, and that Milton's real theme is to show how Adam fell because he did not stand the test of temperance.²⁸

²⁷ In Spenser both "adventures" come to the hero, who is successful, but Spenser also uses *exempla* to illustrate various aspects of his problem. Milton's change is necessitated by the fact that the main outlines of his story are fixed; he is not free to invent his plot as Spenser was. It is perhaps unnecessary to remark that in this paragraph I am purposely omitting important parts of Milton's poem in the attempt to get a clearer view through isolation of that phase of it under discussion. I don't mean to suggest, for example, that Milton admired Spenser's legend of temperance and cast about for a story that he could treat in similar fashion.

²⁸ The inconsistency of an implied imperfection in Adam need not trouble us. For one thing, Milton's conception, as stated in the passage from *Areopagitica* quoted earlier in this paper, is explicit: God gave him reason (temperance) which involves choice; Adam is no mere puppet, but is confronted by a "provoking object" and is left free to choose evil or good. Again, according to Milton, there is no such thing as a negative virtue; Satan becomes for the moment, when he sees Eve, "stupidly good" (IX. 465), but he lacks power, through his degradation, to become positively good. Even in Heaven, the virtues are active and subject to continual test: Abdiel stood such a test, Satan did not. Finally, Milton adopts the idea that man was eventually to take the place in Heaven left vacant by the defection of Satan and

The construction of the story which follows the fall, while influenced by Milton's other sources, is also primarily Spenserian. After their sin, Adam and Eve fall into intemperance through wrath. (IX. 1122 ff.) Their quarrel continues long:

Thus they in mutual accusation spent
The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning;
And of their vain contest appeared no end.

From now on the analogy between the story of Adam and that of Redcrosse becomes very marked. The first book of the *Faerie Queene* follows closely the typical plot of the morality plays. There is the betrayal of virtue through sin (Redcrosse, led astray by Duessa, falls into the hands of Orgoglio); the consequent despair and temptation to suicide (Despair tries to get Redcrosse to kill himself; Una saves the hero); the coming of rescue (Arthur), and then a period of purgation and training in preparation for salvation (the sojourn in the house of Coelia). All these steps are followed by Milton. Adam, plunged in despair, longs for death and Eve advises suicide, thus appearing once more as an evil influence.²⁹ Next, they repent and

his followers. He was put on earth to go through a process of development that should make him fit for Heaven. This development, the nature of which is suggested by Raphael, is interrupted by Adam's sin, and not until Christ made atonement could the original plan be carried out. The perfecting of virtue through trial is Milton's idea here as in *Areopagitica*. It is not characteristic of other versions of the fall of man, so far as I know, and as it is at the heart of Spenser's theory, it seems to me fair to think that Spenser's influence was felt by Milton. Only God is perfect and alone (*Paradise Lost*, VIII. 403-408); angels and men must prove their virtue through trial; when Christ becomes man he too is subjected to temptation, and the test is of his temperance.

²⁹ X. 720 ff. Note that Eve is not like Una but like Despair. Note also that Adam resists Eve's temptation, not through the high reason advanced by Redcrosse but in a speech singularly reminiscent of Belial's reply to Moloch in II. 151 ff. But Milton knows his Spenser thoroughly, as is evidenced by the fact that he uses the most important part of Redcrosse's reply to Despair in Michael's rebuke of Adam's desire for death. With Michael's words:

Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st
Live well; how long or short permit to Heaven,
(XI, 553-554)

compare those of Redcrosse:

The terme of life is limited,
Ne may a man prolong, nor shorten, it:
The souldier may not move from watchfull sted,
Nor leave his stand untill his Captaine bed.
(I. ix. 41)

pray for forgiveness. In response to their prayer, Michael is sent from Heaven to instruct them, as Coelia instructs Redcrosse and as Alma prepares Guyon. It is to be noted, in further proof of my contention that Milton's theme is temperance, that Michael several times points this special moral, as for example in the vision or *Masque of Death*, where the succeeding stages in the history of man from Cain to Noah represent various types of intemperance, and become, therefore, a series of *exempla* such as Spenser uses in the *Faerie Queene*. Thus, Cain represents Wrath; the coming of diseases is attributed to Gluttony; the sons of Seth are betrayed by Lechery; the coming of war brings Pride, Avarice, Envy, and is followed by an epoch in which Idleness is mingled with the other Seven Deadly Sins, the whole illustrating sins against temperance:

Fame in the world, high titles, and rich prey,
Shall change their course to pleasure, ease, and sloth,
Surfeit, and lust, till wantonness and pride
Raise out of friendship hostile deeds in peace.
. For the Earth shall bear
More than enough, that temperance may be tried.
So all shall turn degenerate, all depraved,
Justice and temperance, truth and faith, forgot.³⁰

By this means Adam learns the lesson of Temperance, which is thus seen to be the dominating theme of the entire story, and he is prepared for Salvation. The vision of the history of his descendants has classical warrant, of course, but it is worth noting that Spenser uses the device in the *Faerie Queene* for the enheartenment of his hero through a vision of great destiny. Milton seems to have in mind the scene in which Redcrosse is led to the Mount of Vision by Contemplation, an old man (I. x). The process of preparation for Salvation is completed, and the angel tells Adam:

This having learned, thou hast attained the sum
Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the stars
Thou knew'st by name Only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable; add faith;
Add virtue, patience, temperance; add love,

Nevertheless, the arguments put forth by Despair so move Redcrosse that had it not been for Una he would have yielded.

³⁰ The entire passage begins with XI. 422. The *Masque of the Seven Deadly Sins* is used by Spenser in I. iv. 17 ff. His use of the device is suggested by similar passages in the *Moralities*, though his immediate source, as Professor Lowes has recently pointed out, is Gower.

By name to come called Charity, the soul
 Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loth
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
 A Paradise within thee, happier far. (XII. 575 ff.)²¹

If Spenser's plan had been strictly followed, Adam, now reconciled to God as was Redcrosse, purified by repentance and instructed by Michael, as Redcrosse after bitter repentance was instructed by Coelia, would have met the dragon Satan, as Redcrosse met him, and conquered. This he could not do, for obvious reasons, but at this point Adam the individual is merged in the larger concept Man, and the "greater Man," spoken of in Milton's first invocation, is pointed out as the means by which the triumph over Satan is to be won. So in the contest with the dragon Redcrosse is no longer an Arthurian knight but the type of Christ. The three days contest symbolizes the victory over Satan and the Powers of Darkness, by which the aged King of Eden is freed from his long suffering.

In my exposition of the philosophical content of *Paradise Lost* it has been necessary to disregard Milton's defence of dogma and seemingly to exaggerate certain elements of the poem in order, through isolating them, to make clear their significance. The true statement of the "theme" is not a simple but a complex proposition, and more is involved in the word "justify" than can be phrased in the simple proposition which I nevertheless believe to be fundamental. But is it not true that much of this dogma, however necessary to be observed by a poet dealing with matter supposed to be as fixed as Holy Writ and however sincerely believed by Milton, such material, for instance, as makes up the greater part of the third book,—is it not true that this dogma is in a sense subordinate to the philosophical idealism which I have defined as representing Milton's true interpretation of the problem? To have converted the story of the fall of man, with all its theological accompaniments, into a treatise on the Platonic conception of Temperance, would have been impossible to Milton, and even if he had tried it, his work would not have passed

²¹ In this there is no inconsistency. Adam's fall was not beyond all remedy as was plainly shown by Milton in his Invocation to the first book; it corresponds to the fall of Redcrosse, or Holiness, in Spenser's first book; it also illustrates the fact, already explained, that Milton and Spenser both conceived of virtue as capable of growth.

Note also that the Christian Graces mentioned in this passage (XII. 581 ff.) are part of the preparation of Redcrosse in the House of Coelia. Milton follows the scheme even in details!

the censor. Free conscience, of which he wrote in his sonnet, is not altogether free, as anyone knows who knows Puritanism whether in the seventeenth century or the twentieth. But it is time for us to recognize that Milton, like the others in that little band of exalted spirits—Euripides, Dante, Shakespeare for example—who have reached the topmost heights of song, was greater than his theology. In the discipline and self control of the Platonic conception of Temperance he found an idealism that enriches and informs the entire body of his major work. To leave this philosophical content out, or to see it in *Comus* and not in *Paradise Lost*, is to miss a vital thing. In Spenser Milton found an exposition of idealism in a form that for a variety of reasons made a deeper impression on him than any other single element in his experience. To it his spirit responded as surely as the spirit of Spenser responded to that divine "talk" which Alcibiades wished to grow old in hearing. Beside such influence, the influence of Andreini or Vondel or Grotius seems dry and unilluminated; the discussion of it empty. It was a sense of something far more deeply interfused that caused Milton to recognize in Spenser his "original," and to count him a better teacher than Aquinas.

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